



## **The Wisconsin Idea Shines On for Veterans at UW-Stevens Point**

*By Rep. Katrina Shankland*

Something special is happening at UW-Stevens Point, and soon, at other UW campuses across the state. David Chrisinger, a UWSP graduate and instructor, has created and led an innovative first-year seminar called *Back From the Front*. The course helps first-year student veterans with their transition from military to civilian life by encouraging them to write about their experiences and get involved in the community together. By its nature, the course provides a supportive environment and cohort of classmates who understand each other's experiences.

David Chrisinger's ability to connect his students with opportunities to grow, learn, and foster relationships with the community is empowering. I first met David at the Veterans Print Project, which paired student veterans with art students on campus who created unique prints based on stories the veterans shared. Last year, David brought a veteran and published author to Plover to meet his *Back From the Front* students and swap stories. It was inspiring to watch the students and author interact and learn from each other.

The course has given UWSP student veterans a unique opportunity: in February 2016, students published a book of essays on their stories of war and coming home, called *See Me For Who I Am*. They received national media attention, and the proceeds of the book sales went to the UWSP Veterans Club.

Yet when Governor Walker and Republican legislators passed the 2015-17 budget, they included a \$250 million cut to the UW System, which translated into large cuts at UWSP, including cuts to first-year seminars. This program was too important to let fall by the wayside, especially knowing how connected the students were to each other and how their success was buoyed by the program.

Motivated to secure funding for UWSP to continue this program, I discussed with David and Al LaBelle of Disabled Veterans of America (DVA) the need to expand this program and build on its successes. We invited UW System President Ray Cross to my office to ask him to consider supporting this program and bridging it to other UW campuses.

I'm thrilled to report that our efforts have paid off. The UW System recently announced that they are expanding *Back From the Front* to other UW campuses as early as this fall, and that they will be allocating \$10,000 to UW-Stevens Point to support the development of the seminar for use by other UW System institutions. We owe it to our veterans to expand this program, and I look forward to seeing it continue to grow so that every veteran has a *Back From the Front* course at their own UW campus.

The Wisconsin Idea says that education should positively impact and benefit everyone in Wisconsin, well beyond the borders of university campuses or the boundaries of the classroom. *Back from the Front* enriches our community, supports our veterans, and embodies this principle. I look forward to continue working to make sure that veterans have every opportunity to succeed. We must do everything possible to extend the borders of campus to every home in our community as we celebrate the Wisconsin Idea.